

Statement of Lisa Stoeffler, Bozeman District Ranger
Bozeman Municipal Watershed Project – Gallatin National Forest
September 10, 2013

Chairman Vincent and members of the Water Policy Interim Committee, my name is Lisa Stoeffler and I am the Bozeman District Ranger on the Gallatin National Forest. With me is Marna Daley, Gallatin National Forest Public Affairs Officer. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the committee regarding the Bozeman Municipal Watershed Project.

- The Bozeman Municipal Watershed project or BMW project encompasses portions of Bozeman and Hyalite drainages, located approximately 10 miles south of the city of Bozeman. These watersheds offer very popular recreation opportunities within minutes of the downtown Bozeman and **provide over 80%** of the City's water supply.
- The BMW project was initiated as and continues to be a joint project of the Gallatin National Forest, the City of Bozeman and citizens concerned with the current and future risks to the municipal water supply of Bozeman.
- The City of Bozeman and the Gallatin National Forest have had an active partnership for almost 10 years to ensure quality stewardship of the city's source water through active management, including vegetation management.
- The project was identified as a priority wildland/urban interface treatment area in the Gallatin County Community Wildfire Protection Plan.
- The purpose of this project is to reduce the risk of severe and extensive wildfire on National Forest system lands within the municipal watersheds of the City of Bozeman, thereby maintaining a high-quality, predictable water supply for Bozeman. Recently there have been three wildland fires near the project area that have threatened the municipal watershed. The North Eight Mile, Millie and Horsetail fires were lightning caused and very expensive to suppress because of the values at risk, Bozeman's water supply and the wildland urban interface.
- The project encompasses 4,700 acres of treatment across the 50,000 acre assessment area. Treatments on National Forest lands include prescribed burning, commercial timber removal, pre-commercial thinning, brush removal, slashing and road rehabilitation. The treatments are focused on the lower third of the drainages closest to the water intake and treatment facilities.
- This project will begin to reduce the potential of severe and extensive wildfire on the National Forest System lands to support the following objectives:
 - Maintain a high quality, predictable water supply for the City of Bozeman;
 - Reduce the risk of sediment and ash impacting the municipal water treatment plant;
 - Provide for firefighter and public safety in heavily used one-way-in, one-way-out drainages; and

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- Manage the fuels in the wildland urban interface area to reduce the potential of fire spread between public and private lands adjacent to the two municipal watersheds.
- The project begins to strategically change the vegetative conditions in order to achieve the project's objectives of reducing the risk of severe and extensive wildfire. Implementation of the project cannot guarantee or completely protect the watersheds from fire starts or the potential for a large wildfire, but it can help mitigate the potential after-effects if a large-wildfire were to burn within the watershed
- Limiting sediment delivery to the municipal watershed is of the highest concern in the design of the BMW project – both sediment delivery as a result of the Forest Service's actions as well as the potential sediment and ash delivery from wildfire. The strictest standards for water quality were observed in the project's development and assessment.
- The City of Bozeman continues to be a key partner and supporter of this project. The city owns and manages roughly six sections of land within the project area and is developing a vegetation treatment plan on these sections that compliments this project.
- The high quality water that these drainages provide is invaluable. A wildland fire of any significance in these drainages could result in a loss of water supply ranging from a few days to several weeks over multiple years. This could be devastating and expensive for the City of Bozeman and its residents. The watersheds are also one of the most visited recreation destinations in the state of Montana, hosting over 10,000 people on any weekend. This recreation resource is a critically important economic driver for this community.
- After many years of planning, appeals and litigation, the Forest Service is awaiting a final ruling from District Court on a Motion for Reconsideration in order for the project to move forward. The City of Bozeman has been granted *Amicus* status in this case and continues to be an active participant. The project preparation is complete and implementation could move forward as soon as litigation is resolved. We expect that the City will couple treatments on their land with the treatments on National Forest lands.
- We are appreciative of the visible and active support we have received for this project from the local DNRC office and continue to coordinate with similar work on nearby State lands.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding the BMW project. We appreciate your interest in this project given its importance to the Bozeman community and the state of Montana. We will remain available for questions.

